

Literacy Terms at a Glance

A

Advanced phonics

Strategies for decoding multisyllabic words that include morphology and information about the meaning, pronunciation, and parts of speech of words gained from knowledge of prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

Affixes

Affixes are word parts that are "fixed to" either the beginnings of words (prefixes) or the endings of words (suffixes). The word *disrespectful* has two affixes, a prefix (dis-) and a suffix (-ful).

Alliteration

The repetition of the initial phoneme of each word in connected text (e.g., Harry the happy hippo hula-hoops with Henrietta).

Alphabetic principle

The understanding that spoken words are made up of sounds that can be represented by letters in print.

Analogy

Comparing two sets of words to show some common similarity between the sets. When done as a vocabulary exercise this requires producing one of the words (e.g., cat is to kitten: as dog is to ____?).

Antonym

A word opposite in meaning to another word.

Automaticity

Automaticity is a general term that refers to any skilled and complex behavior that can be performed rather easily with little attention, effort, or conscious awareness. These skills become automatic after extended periods of training. With practice and good instruction, students become automatic at word recognition, that is, retrieving words from memory, and are able to focus attention on constructing meaning from the text, rather than decoding.

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B

Base words

Base words are words from which many other words are formed. For example, many words can be formed from the base word *migrate*: *migration, migrant, immigration, immigrant, migrating, migratory*. Also called a free morpheme.

Blend

A blend is a consonant sequence before or after a vowel within a syllable, such as *cl*, *br*, or *st*; it is the written language equivalent of consonant cluster.

Blending

Combining units of sound (syllables, onsets and rimes, phonemes) to form a word.

C

Chunking

A decoding strategy for breaking words into manageable parts (e.g., /yes /ter/ day). Chunking also refers to the process of dividing a sentence into smaller phrases where pauses might occur naturally (e.g., When the sun appeared after the storm, / the newly fallen snow /shimmered like diamonds).

Cognates

Words that are related to each other by virtue of being derived from a common origin (e.g., 'decisive' and 'decision' or *education* (English) and *educación* (Spanish)).

Comprehension

Understanding what one is reading, the ultimate goal of all reading activity.

Comprehension strategies

Comprehension strategies are techniques to teach reading comprehension, including summarization, prediction, and inferring word meanings from context.

Concepts of print

The knowledge that printed words carry meaning, and that reading and writing are ways to get information. Includes knowledge of the parts of a book, directionality, print structure, and features of a text.

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Consonant blend

Two or more consecutive consonants which retain their individual sounds (e.g., /bl/ in block; /str/ in string).

Consonant digraph

Two consecutive consonants that represent one phoneme, or sound (e.g., /ch/, /sh/).

Context clues

Context clues are sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words. Context clues may be drawn from the immediate sentence containing the word, from text already read, from pictures accompanying the text, or from definitions, restatements, examples, or descriptions in the text.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning involves students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks. It has been used successfully to teach comprehension strategies in content-area subjects.

D

Decodable text

Text in which a high proportion of words comprise sound-symbol relationships that have already been taught. It is used for the purpose of providing practice with specific decoding skills and is a bridge between learning phonics and the application of phonics in independent reading.

Decoding

The ability to translate a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences. It is also the act of deciphering a new word by sounding it out.

Dialogic reading

During story reading, the teacher/parent asks questions, adds information, and prompts student to increase sophistication of responses by expanding on his/her utterances.

Digraphs

A group of two consecutive letters whose phonetic value is a single sound (e.g., /ea/ in bread; /ch/ in chat; /ng/ in sing).

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Diphthong

A vowel produced by the tongue shifting position during articulation; a vowel that feels as if it has two parts, especially the vowels spelled ow, oy, ou, and oi.

Directionality

A component of concepts of print, directionality includes knowledge about how to read an English book or text, including: read top to bottom, read left to right, identify first and last word, tracking, and return sweep.

E

Emergent literacy

The skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing.

Explicit

Explicit instruction is step-by-step, and the actions of the teacher are clear, specific, direct, and related to the learning objective.

Expository text

Reports factual information (also referred to as informational text) and the relationships among ideas. Expository text tends to be more difficult for students than narrative text because of the density of long, difficult, and unknown words or word parts.

Expressive language

Language that is spoken.

F

Flexible grouping

Grouping students according to shared instructional needs and abilities and regrouping as their instructional needs change. Group size and allocated instructional time may vary among groups.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding words, they can focus their attention on what the text means.

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Formal assessment

Follows a prescribed format for administration and scoring. Scores obtained from formal tests are standardized, meaning that interpretation is based on norms from a comparative sample of children.

G

Genre

A category of artistic composition, as in literature or music, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.

Grapheme

A grapheme is a letter or letter combination that spells a single phoneme. In English, a grapheme may be one, two, three, or four letters, such as *e*, *ei*, *igh*, or *eigh*.

Graphic and semantic organizers

A visual framework or structure for capturing the main points of what is being read, which may include concepts, ideas, events, vocabulary, or generalizations. Graphic organizers allow ideas in text and thinking processes to become external by showing the interrelatedness of ideas, thus facilitating understanding for the reader. The structure of a graphic organizer is determined by the structure of the kind of text being read: maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters. Semantic organizers are graphic organizers that look somewhat like a spider web where lines connect a central concept to a variety of related ideas and events.

Guided practice

Students practice newly learned skills with the teacher providing prompts and feedback.

H

High frequency irregular words

Words in print containing letters that stray from the most common sound pronunciation because they do not follow common phonic patterns (e.g., *were*, *was*, *laugh*, *been*).

High frequency words

A small group of words (300-500) that account for a large percentage of the words in print and can be regular or irregular words (i.e., Dolch or Fry). Often, they are referred to as “sight words” since automatic recognition of these words is required for fluent reading.

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Homograph

Words that are spelled the same but have different origins and meanings. They may or may not be pronounced the same (e.g., *can* as in a metal container / *can* as in able to OR *bow* as in a ribbon worn in the hair / *bow* as in bending at the hip as a sign of respect / *bow* as in the front end of a ship).

Homonym

Words that sound the same but are spelled differently (e.g., cents/sense, knight/night).

Homophone

Words that may or may not be spelled alike but are pronounced the same. These words are of different origins and have different meanings (e.g., ate and eight; scale as in the covering of a fish; and scale as in a device used to weigh things)

I

Implicit instruction

The opposite of explicit instruction. Students discover skills and concepts instead of being explicitly taught. For example, the teacher writes a list of words on the board that begin with the letter “m” (mud, milk, meal, and mattress) and asks the students how the words are similar. The teacher elicits from the students that the letter “m” stands for the sound you hear at the beginning of the words.

Independent reading level

The level at which a reader can read text with 95% accuracy (i.e., no more than one error per 20 words read). Independent reading level is relatively easy text for the reader.

Informal assessment

Does not follow prescribed rules for administration and scoring and has not undergone technical scrutiny for reliability and validity. Teacher-made tests, end-of-unit tests, and running records are all examples of informal assessment

Informational text

Non-fiction books, also referred to as expository text, that contain facts and information.

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Instructional routines

Instructional routines include the following sequence of steps:

- Explicit instruction
- Modeling
- Guided practice
- Student practice, application, and feedback
- Generalization

Invented spelling

An attempt to spell a word based on a student's knowledge of the spelling system and how it works (e.g., kt for cat).

Irregular words

Words that contain letters that stray from the most common sound pronunciation; words that do not follow common phonic patterns (e.g., were, was, laugh, been).

K

K-W-L

A technique used most frequently with expository text to promote comprehension. It can be used as a type of graphic organizer in the form of a chart, and it consists of a 3-step process: What I Know (accessing prior knowledge), What I Want to Know (setting a purpose for reading), and What I Learned (recalling what has been read).

L

Letter combinations

Also referred to as digraphs, a group of consecutive letters that represents a particular sound(s) in the majority of words in which it appears (e.g., /ai/ in maid; /ch/ in chair; /ar/ in car; /kn/ in know; /ng/ in ring).

Literacy

Literacy includes reading, writing, and the creative and analytical acts involved in producing and comprehending texts.

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M

Morpheme

A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language. A morpheme can be one syllable (*book*) or more than one syllable (*seventeen*). It can be a whole word or a part of a word such as a prefix or suffix. For example, the word *ungrateful* contains three morphemes: *un*, *grate*, and *ful*.

Morphology

Units of meaning within words. The study of how words are formed from prefixes, roots, and suffixes (e.g., *mis-spell-ing*), and how words are related to each other.

N

Narrative text

A story about fictional or real events.

O

Onset and rime

Onset and rime are two parts of a word. The onset is the initial consonant sound, blend, or digraph in a single syllable word or syllable. Not all words have onsets, such as the word *oar*. The rime is the first vowel phoneme followed by all the other phonemes (*at* in *rat*; *esh* in *fresh*). Words that share the same rime are considered rhyming words (e.g., *fresh*, *mesh*, *flesh*).

Oral language

Spoken language. There are five components of oral language: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Orthography

The conventional spelling and writing system of a language.

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P

Phoneme

Phonemes are the smallest units of spoken language that makes a difference in the meaning of a word. A phoneme combines with other phonemes to make words. For example, if you change the first phoneme in *bat* from /b/ to /p/, the word *bat* changes to *pat*. Most linguists agree that English has about 44 phonemes: 19 vowel phonemes and 25 consonant phonemes. A few words, such as *a* or *oh*, have only one phoneme. Most words have more than one phoneme. The word *if* has two phonemes /i/ and /f/.

- **Phoneme addition**

In this activity, children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word. (Teacher: What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of *park*? Children: *spark*.)

- **Phoneme blending**

In this activity, children learn to listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine the phonemes to form a word. (Teacher: What word is /b/ /i/ /g/? Children: /b/ /i/ /g/ is *big*.)

- **Phoneme categorization**

In this activity, children recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has the "odd" sound. (Teacher: Which word doesn't belong? *bun*, *bus*, *rug*. Children: *Rug* does not belong. It doesn't begin with a /b/.)

- **Phoneme deletion**

In this activity, children learn to recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word. (Teacher: What is *smile* without the /s/? Children: *Smile* without the /s/ is *mile*.)

- **Phoneme identity**

In this activity, children learn to recognize the same sounds in different words. (Teacher: What sound is the same in *fix*, *fall*, and *fun*? Children: The first sound, /f/, is the same.)

- **Phoneme isolation**

In this activity, children learn to recognize and identify individual sounds in a word. (Teacher: What is the first sound in *van*? Children: The first sound in *van* is /v/.)

- **Phoneme segmentation**

In this activity, children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it. (Teacher: How many sounds are in *grab*? Children: /g/ /r/ /a/ /b/. Four sounds.)

- **Phoneme substitution**

In this activity, children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word. (Teacher: The word is *bun*. Change /g/ to /n/. What's the new word? Children: *bun*.)

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Phoneme manipulation

Adding, deleting, and substituting sounds in words (e.g., add /b/ to oat to make boat; delete /p/ in pat to make at; substitute /o/ for /a/ in pat to make pot).

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. An example of how beginning readers show us they have phonemic awareness is combining or blending the separate sounds of a word to say the word ("/c/ /a/ /t/ - cat.")

Phonics

A method for teaching reading by applying the systematic, predictable relationship between written letters and spoken sounds (the alphabetic principle).

- **Analogy-based phonics**

In this approach, children are taught to use parts of words they have already learned to read and decode words they don't know. They apply this strategy when the words share similar parts in their spellings, for example, reading *screen* by analogy to *green*. Children may be taught a large set of key words for use in reading new words.

- **Analytic phonics**

In this approach, children learn to analyze letter-sound relationships in previously learned words. They do not pronounce sounds in isolation.

- **Embedded phonics**

In this approach, children learn vocabulary through explicit instruction on the letter-sound relationships during the reading of connected text, usually when the teacher notices that a child is struggling to read a particular word. Letter-sound relationships are taught as part of sight word reading. If the sequence of letter-sounds is not prescribed and sequenced, but is determined by whatever words are encountered in text, then the program is not systematic or explicit.

- **Onset-rime phonics instruction**

In this approach, children learn to break monosyllabic words into their onsets (consonants preceding the vowel) and rimes (vowel and following consonants). They read each part separately and then blend the parts to say the whole word.

- **Phonics through spelling**

In this approach, children learn to segment words into phonemes and to make words by writing letters for phonemes.

- **Synthetic phonics**

In this instructional approach, children learn how to convert letters or letter combinations into a sequence of sounds, and then how to blend the sounds together to form recognizable words.

- **Systematic and explicit phonics instruction**

The most effective way to teach phonics. A program is systematic if the plan of instruction includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence. Explicit means the programs provide teachers with precise directions for the teaching of these relationships.

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Phonogram

A succession of letters that represent the same phonological unit in different words, such as “igh” in flight, might, tight, sigh, and high.

Phonological awareness

The ability to recognize that spoken words are made up of individual sound parts. It includes (from simplest to most complex) word awareness, recognition of rhyme and alliteration, syllable awareness, onset and rime blending, and phonemic awareness.

Pragmatics

Appropriate word choice and use in context to communicate effectively.

Print awareness/basic print concepts

Print awareness is basic knowledge about print and how it is typically organized on a page. For example, print conveys meaning, print is read left to right, and words are separated by spaces.

Prosody

Reading with expression, proper intonation, and phrasing. This helps reading to sound as if they are speaking the part they are reading. It is also this element of fluency that sets apart from automaticity.

R

Rate

The speed at which a person reads.

Readability level

Refers to independent, instructional, and frustrational levels of text reading.

Rime

The "onset" is the initial phonological unit of any word (e.g. c in cat) and the term "rime" refers to the string of letters that follow, usually a vowel and final consonants (e.g. at in cat). Not all words have onsets.

Rhyming

Words that have the same ending sound.

Root

A bound morpheme, usually of Latin origin, that cannot stand alone but is used to form a family of words with related meanings.

S

Schema

Refers to prior knowledge, the knowledge and experience that readers bring to the text. (A term coined by Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist who studied how children construct knowledge.)

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Schwa

The vowel sound sometimes heard in an unstressed syllable and is most often sounded as /uh/ or as the short /u/ sound as in cup.

Scope and sequence

A “roadmap” or “blueprint” for teachers that provides an overall picture of an instructional program and includes the range of teaching content and the order or sequence in which it is taught.

Segmenting

Separating the individual phonemes, or sounds, of a word into discrete units.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is the mental act of knowing when one does and does not understand what one is reading. When students use self-monitoring strategies, they actively think about how they are learning or understanding the material, activities, or reading in which they are engaged.

Semantic maps

Portray the schematic relations that compose a concept; a strategy for graphically representing concepts.

Semantics

The way language conveys meaning.

Sight words

These are words that are recognized immediately. Sometimes sight words are thought to be irregular, or high frequency words (e.g., the Dolch and Fry lists). However, any word that is recognized automatically is a sight word. These words may be phonetically regular or irregular.

Spelling patterns

Refers to digraphs, vowel pairs, word families, and vowel variant spellings.

Suffix

An affix attached to the end of a base, root, or stem that changes the meaning or grammatical function of the word, as “en” in oxen.

Syllable

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation or word part that contains only one vowel sound (e-vent, news-pa-per).

Syllable types

There are six syllable types:

- Closed: cat, cobweb
- Open: he, silo
- Vowel-consonant-e (VCE): like, milestone
- Consonant-l-e: candle, juggle (second syllable)
- R-controlled: star, corner
- Vowel pairs: count, rainbow

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Synonym

Words that have similar meanings.

Syntax

Phrase and sentence structure (Grammar).

T

Target words

Are specifically addressed, analyzed, and/or studied in curriculum lessons, exercises, and independent activities.

Text features

A component of concepts of print, includes knowledge of the features in a text or book, such as page numbers, table of contents, illustrations and photographs, chapter titles, headings, captions, labels, infographics, and diagrams.

Text structure

The various patterns of ideas that are embedded in the organization of text (e.g., cause-effect, comparison-contrast, story grammar).

Think-alouds

During shared read aloud, teachers reveal their thinking processes by verbalizing: connections, questions, inferences, and predictions.

V

Vocabulary

Knowledge of the meaning and pronunciation of words. Listening vocabulary refers to the words a person knows when hearing them in oral speech. Speaking vocabulary refers to the words we use when we speak. Reading vocabulary refers to the words a person knows when seeing them in print. Writing vocabulary refers to the words we use in writing.

Vowel digraph or vowel pair

Two vowels together that represent one phoneme, or sound (e.g., ea, ai, oa).

W

Word family

Group of words that share a rime (a vowel plus the consonants that follow; e.g., -ame, -ick,-out).

Word roots

Word roots are words from other languages that are the origin of many English words. About 60 percent of all English words have Latin or Greek origins.

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Word study

The act of deliberately investigating words (e.g., vocabulary-building exercises, word-identification practice, and spelling).

Modified from source material found on : <https://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/glossary>